

Avoiding Exercise-Related Injuries

With the advent of the Coast Guard fitness program, Coasties are getting increasingly involved in exercise programs. Units are doing everything from working with folks on the Weight Management program to creating voluntary and mandatory Unit-wide physical fitness instructions in an effort to establish a healthier and more fit Coast Guard. For some, this has led to increased concern about exercise-related injuries. For those of us just starting a program, the last time we actually exercised on a regular basis may have been years ago...so jumping into a program can potentially put us at high risk for injury. Even those of us who already exercise regularly are still at risk for injury as we take on new challenges or change our routines. So how do we exercise safely and avoid injury? The old adage “good judgment comes from experience and experience comes from bad judgment” holds true for both experienced and novice exercisers alike. Bad judgment, poor choices, and common exercise mistakes can lead to whole slew of aches, pains, and injuries affecting our ability to maintain a commitment to an exercise program.

Probably the most common type of exercise-related injury is not actually a single injury, but rather a broad category encompassing the majority of injuries termed “overuse injuries.” Overuse injuries are chronic injuries. No single event causes overuse injuries (as with a pulled muscle or a broken bone), but rather they are a result of a series of events over weeks, months, or even years of training that weaken or irritate a part of the body to the point that exercise eventually becomes painful or even impossible. Some common types of overuse injuries are things such as runner’s knee, tennis elbow, shin splints, plantar fasciitis, tendonitis, and bursitis. Stresses on the body can build over time causing aching kneecaps, stress fractures, tender tendons, or strained muscles. However, you don’t have to exercise very intensely or even for a long period of time to develop an overuse injury. Worn-out shoes, uneven or unforgiving running surfaces, poor body alignment, and muscular imbalances can all contribute to these types of injuries. Below are some of the pitfalls that prevent us from safely becoming or staying fit - and how to avoid them.

Poor Technique

Pay attention to your technique and form, regardless of the activity. Be sure to support your back and don’t lock your joints when lifting weights...pay close attention to how your body is aligned.

Poor Activity Choices

Weight-bearing exercises like running and walking are great for most people; however, they can be too demanding for individuals with bone, joint, or muscle problems, or for those who are very overweight. Non-weight-bearing exercises (like cycling or swimming) are effective alternates. For some people, exercises with barbells place too much stress on the joints, especially those of the shoulders and elbows. Using weight machines and dumbbells can reduce this stress and allow weight training to continue without pain.

Improper Equipment

This includes exercise machines and equipment, as well as proper clothing and footwear. Be sure to properly adjust exercise equipment for your size to help prevent injury. For example, exercise bicycles with a seat set too low can cause knee problems.

Exercise clothing should be comfortable, let you move freely, and allow your body to cool itself. Heat, humidity, and high altitude place a lot of stress on the body during exercise. During conditions like these, don't try to accomplish as much as you would under more ideal conditions. In cold weather, protect your skin – especially your ears, fingers, and toes.

When choosing athletic shoes, consider the activity. Shoes appropriate for different activities have very different characteristics. Running shoes, for example, typically have highly cushioned soles with elevated heels, and a great deal of flexibility in the forefoot. The heels of walking shoes tend to be lower and less padded than those designed for running. Court shoes have straight, nonflared heels that provide substantial support and allow for safe and easy lateral movements. Foot type is another important consideration. If your feet tend to roll in excessively, you may need shoes with additional stability features on the inner side of the shoe to counteract this movement. If your feet tend to roll outward excessively, you may need flexible and cushioned shoes that promote foot motion. Shop at an athletic shoe store that has personnel trained to fit athletic shoes properly.

Too Much Too Soon

Some people try to undo numerous years of inactivity in a few days or weeks. It is important to build your exercise program gradually. As a general rule, frequency, intensity, and duration should not increase more than 10% in a subsequent week. Another common mistake is the “no pain, no gain” mindset. Exercise is not supposed to hurt. If you feel real discomfort, it's a signal that something is wrong or that you are asking more than your body can tolerate at that point in time.

No Rest For the Weary

Exercise takes a toll on the body. It needs time to recover. This may be as simple as building a couple of rest days into your exercise regimen each week and getting enough sleep each night. However, sometimes people try to train too hard to improve performance and end up training beyond the body's ability to effectively recover between workouts. If you find yourself dragging through workouts and dreading them, or feeling exhausted throughout the day because of hard workouts, you may be doing more exercise than your body can handle. Over-training is a perfect set up for injury! Cut back to where your workouts are comfortable again or take a few days off completely, and then return to your program at a much reduced level and gradually work back into it. Another strategy to help prevent burnout and overuse injuries is to cross train. Cross training is simply engaging in different types of activities to develop fitness. For example, to develop cardiorespiratory fitness, don't just run all of the time – run, climb steps, swim, ride a bike, or take an aerobics class. Mix it up!

Skipping the Warm-Up and Cool-Down

The body needs an adjustment period. Always start a workout with a slow, comfortable warm-up activity (like walking) to allow your body time (generally 5-10 minutes) to make the needed adjustments and gradually progress to faster speeds/harder work. The reverse is also true. Don't stop abruptly after a workout. Gradually slow the pace of the activity versus coming to a screeching halt! Stretch the muscles you used during your workout as part of your cool-down period.

The Weekend Warrior Syndrome

Some people try to squeeze a week's worth of exercise into a single weekend. Cramming it all in at one time can stress the body to its' limits and greatly increase your risk for injury. The key to success is consistency. On days where you are limited on time, it's better to do something, even if it's not as much as you would like, than nothing at all. *Some* exercise regularly is better than sporadic, lengthy workouts.

Above all, listen to your body. If you experience any sharp pain, pay attention! Your body is telling you there is a problem. Pushing through pain is the fastest way to develop a chronic injury. If you don't feel well, take some time off and allow your body time to heal.

Recipe of the Month

Artichoke And Mushroom Casserole

Ingredients:

9 ounces artichoke hearts
1 teaspoon olive oil
1/2 cup onion -- finely chopped
2 cloves garlic -- finely chopped
3 cups sliced mushrooms
1 teaspoon dried basil
1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
Salt and pepper -- to taste
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 tablespoon dry white wine
1 tablespoon Italian seasoned bread crumbs

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly oil a 1-quart baking dish or spray with a nonstick cooking spray. Cook frozen artichokes according to package directions (1-16 oz. can of artichokes can be substituted, these need only be drained). Drain and place in pan. Heat oil in a medium nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add onion and garlic. Cook 3 minutes, stirring frequently. Add mushrooms, sprinkle with spices. Add lemon juice and wine. Cook for 3 minutes, stirring frequently. Remove from heat and stir in bread crumbs. Spoon mushroom mixture evenly over artichokes. Bake uncovered for 30 minutes.

Nutrition Facts:

Servings: 6
Amount Per Serving: Calories 51
Fat 1 g, Cholesterol 0 mg
Carbohydrates 9 g, Sodium 76 mg

Unit of the Month

ISC NOLA

Small Steps

The Unit of the Month for February is ISC New Orleans. ISC New Orleans' commitment to the health and well being of its members has clearly been demonstrated over the past 18 months. During 2004, 4 active duty members and 1 civilian attended the UHPC training and formed a committee charged with improving the health of the Command. To gauge the overall health of its members, ISC New Orleans completed PWP assessments of all active duty personnel. This information was used to determine the high-risk areas of the Unit and to provide a focus for health promotion program activities. The three highest risk areas identified were nutrition, physical fitness and healthy weight. The Health Promotion committee went to work. The central concept of the ISC New Orleans health promotion program is a focus on encouraging folks to take small steps that lead to a healthier lifestyle. Small step one was the establishment of the ISC New Orleans Physical Fitness Program, ISCNOLAINST 3502.1. The first drafts of the Unit instruction included mandatory bi-annual fitness assessments and PWP completion by all military members. It was later revised to reflect the timeline established in ALCOAST 329/04, Establishment of Coast Guard Fitness Program. The major elements include:

- Unofficial weigh-ins each August and February, allowing ample time for members to prepare for official weigh-ins in October and April.
- Mandatory completion of PWPs and physical fitness assessments each August and February
- Members not meeting the "desirable" standards on physical fitness assessments are required to see a HPC for assistance in developing a fitness program.

Since then the ISC New Orleans instruction has been adopted by many other CG Units to develop their own programs.

The next small step was to develop a program that would be accepted by the majority of the command...to include those that were already physically fit and those that needed to begin a more active lifestyle. It was decided that in order for this to work it had to have two main components: it must be fun and it must be rewarding. This began the implementation of the 2005 CO's Fitness Challenge. Here are the basics:

- Challenge is to earn at least 2005 points in a three-month period.
- Points earned are for fitness, nutrition, completion of PWPs, physical fitness assessment, and cholesterol and BP screenings, weight loss, body fat loss, tobacco cessation, blood donation, participation in fitness/health seminars (i.e., tobacco cessation class, developing a personal fitness plan, running/walking clinic, nutrition seminar, healthy cooking class, stress management class, and a weight maintenance seminar.
- Additional points are given for running in the New Orleans Crescent City Classic as part of the Coast Guard platoon.

- Teams must be comprised of at least 6-8 members and headed by a CPO or CWO. This allows senior leadership to set the example and support members participating.
- There are 19 teams with 140 members participating from the ISC, ESU, NESU and ANT.
- Results are published weekly and posted on the fitness center bulletin board, which also includes photos of “teams in action,” top 10 leaders, upcoming events, and nutrition and fitness information.
- Mystery bonus points are given at surprise events (i.e., at a recent Morale event, bonus points were awarded for participating in a fitness/fun challenge comprised of a relay race, ping pong tournament and blindfolded basketball shoot).
- All members participating will receive a 2005 CO’s Fitness Challenge T-shirt, compliments of the ISC Morale Committee.
- The categories for awards will include: highest overall team average, teams equaling or exceeding the CO’s team average score, equaling or exceeding 2005 points, and overall individual high score.
- The CO’s Challenge comes to a close with an awards presentation at the ISC Crawfish Boil on April 14th.

For more information on these ISC NOLA programs, please visit our website at <http://cgweb.lant.uscg.mil/iscneworleans/> or contact one of the ISC New Orleans HPC’s listed below.

Special thanks to CWO Jack Robinson, Mr. Bob Casale, PO Travis Clark, MCPO Alvia Lee, and LT Talisha Rosen for their hard work and dedication to the ISC New Orleans Health Promotion Program.

Special thanks to Michelle Murray, Health Promotion Manager at ISC New Orleans, for writing the Health Promotion Bulletin this month.



mailto: TSchneider@COMDT.uscg.mil



(202) 267-6624



(202) 267-4798



mailto: mlmurray@iscnola.uscg.mil



(504) 942-4061



(504) 942-4097